

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Please amend the paragraph starting on page 18, line 9 and ending on page 18, line 13 to be as follows:

Figure 2 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary protocol stack ~~363~~37 for network devices in the Ethernet-return cable system 10. In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, network entities in the Ethernet-return cable system 10 are DOCSIS compliant. However, other standards may also be used, and the present invention is not limited to DOCSIS compliant network entities.

Please amend the paragraph starting on page 26, line 1 and ending on page 26, line 6 to be as follows:

At step 128, the second network device sends the first message to the first network device. Upon the receipt of the first message, the first network device may establish an upstream communication link using the parameters received in the first message, as shown at step 130. According to an exemplary embodiment, the first network device may establish the upstream link by setting a predetermined network interface (port) to an upstream connection network interface.

Please amend the paragraph starting on page 40, line 17 and ending on page 41, line 2 to be as follows:

At step ~~458~~460, the second network device decapsulates the first message and forwards it to multiple first protocol servers. Further, when the second network device receives the first message, the second network device determines whether a connection address is included in one

of the fields in the first message. If the connection address is not in the first message, the second network device puts its own downstream connection address into the first message. Further, the second network device may verify the integrity of the first message. In one embodiment, if the first message fails certain integrity checks, the second network device may drop the first message.